

**RI Drought Steering Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
August 16, 2005**

**1. CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Mr. Daniel W. Varin, Chairman of the RI Water Resources Board (WRB), called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. He welcomed members stating the RI Drought Steering Committee was convened, not to push the panic button, but to review the committee responsibilities and procedures to use if hydrologic and climatological indices warrant. Members were asked to introduce themselves and the agency they represented (Attachment A).

**2. DROUGHT STEERING COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES and DROUGHT PLAN INDICES**

Ms. Kathleen Crawley, Acting General Manager, reviewed the Committee responsibilities. She stated that Beverly O'Keefe, Supervising Planner, has been monitoring conditions, providing status reports to the Public Drinking Water Protection Committee each month, and is responsible for coordinating today's meeting. She stated that today's meeting was held to review responsibilities and to bring the community together to respond to current conditions.

Ms. Crawley stated the WRB coordinates the drought management process, and convenes the Drought Steering Committee which includes agencies that routinely collect and monitor data critical to assessing drought phases in the state's seven identified drought regions (Attachment B). The WRB is responsible for maintaining a current membership/contact list that includes federal and state agencies, local water suppliers, and community officials. With the Committee, the WRB is responsible for recommending the appropriate phases of drought to the Governor. She noted the primary responsibilities of the committee are to:

- Review information gathered by the WRB to assess the impact of dry conditions
- Recommend drought phases and appropriate responses to drought-related impacts

Ms. Crawley reported the five drought indices (Palmer Drought Index, Crop Moisture Index, Precipitation, Stream Flow, Ground water levels, and Reservoir levels) and phases Normal, Advisory, Watch, Warning, and Emergency) of the RI Drought Management Plan are based on national indices and phases identified by the National Drought Mitigation Center and the National Weather Service. The indices anticipate drought conditions, and allow for the use of early warning public education and outreach efforts.

**3. EVALUATE STATE AND LOCAL CONDITIONS**

Mr. Joe Dellicarpini, Senior Hydrologist, NOAA National Weather Service, presented an overview of current conditions supported by short- and long-range forecasts. He reported the wet spring transitioned into a dry period for several months resulting in an abnormally dry period (Drought Monitor Map, August 9, 2005). His presentation highlighted the use of the "Standardized Precipitation Index" that takes into account longer trends and is more responsive than the Palmer Drought Index. Mr. Dellicarpini concluded his presentation by stating that the long-term 14-day forecast reveals an equal chance of above or below rainfall with above normal temperatures. He stated it was his opinion that Rhode Island is currently in a short term dry spell bordering on an "advisory" condition. At the conclusion of his presentation, Mr. Henry Meyer, Manager, Kingston Water Department, noted that the '99 drought began at this time of year. (Please contact Ms. O'Keefe if you would like to receive a copy of the PowerPoint presentation).

Mr. Mark T. Nimiroski, Hydrologist, U.S. Geological Survey, reported on surface and ground water conditions. He noted that surface water runoff was in the below normal range. Ground water levels were

reported to be slightly above normal. He stated that stream flow levels for August have been below normal but that the rainfall received August 13-14, provided a small increase in stream flow levels.

Mr. Eugene, Pepper, Principal Environmental Planner, Division of Agriculture, RI Department of Environmental Management, stated reports are coming in on small fruit sizes as a direct result of lack of precipitation. He stated ground water areas are 3-4 inches below expectations especially in the Pawcatuck basin. He reported an increase in irrigation pond permit requests although staff is taking a conservative approach to permitting at this time. Staff is recommending the current pond low water levels provide an opportunity to dredge and clean existing ponds. He concluded by stating the water table is 4 inches below normal and that DEM has placed pond permit approvals on the fast track. He clarified that pond permits provide irrigation for the agricultural community.

Mr. Al Bettencourt, RI Agricultural Council, reported that it is very dry out there with current and future crops negatively affected. He noted the lack of precipitation negatively affects farmers who will and are suffering economically.

Mr. Joe Dellicarpini, NWS, reported that he had spoken with Alan Dunham (NWS) regarding the level of fire danger. Brush fire potential, as a result of low relative humidity and gusty wind conditions is high leading to an increase in fire danger.

Major water suppliers provided updates on water supply and demand. Mr. Steve Goslee, Director, Jamestown Water Division, and President, RI Water Works Association, reported Jamestown reservoirs are at 75% capacity. He expects the next 2-3 weeks will set the scene for determining "drought conditions." Ms. Julia Forgue, Director, Newport Water Works, reported Aquidneck Island reservoirs are down to 51% of capacity, and they have started pumping water from Little Compton.

Mr. Henry Meyer, Manager, Kingston Water District, reported the '99 drought began in the later summer/early fall of 1998. In 1999, the District asked its customers to limit outside water use to the hours of 7:00 pm to 6:00 am. In 2005, the District did not have any bans or limitations in place. Daily demand in 2005 was similar to the daily demand in 1999 post imposition of water restrictions. Ground water levels at Wells #1 and #2 in 2002 were slightly lower than in 2005. Ground water levels were not available for Well #3 because that facility did not go on line until November 2003. The figures presented in the following table were reported at the August meeting.

Static Level	2005	2004	2003	2002	1999
Well #1	8.90	8.89	8.64	9.35	N.A.
Well #2	12.03	11.70	11.63	12.40	13.01

The purpose of reporting the figures in the above table was to demonstrate that ground water levels for the last several years including two drought years were in fairly close alignment, with 1999 being an exception. He noted the humidity seems to be buffering the lack of rain, and ground water levels are normal. Mr. Meyer stated Kingston has structured the water rates to promote water conservation.

Mr. Boyce Spinelli, General Manager, Providence Water Supply Board reported the Board is not contemplating implementation of water restrictions at this time although they are tracking water conditions on a daily basis. He noted the next 2-3 weeks will determine if water restrictions are necessary. Mr. Al Mancini, RI Division of Public Utilities and Carriers, stated water consumption has decreased in the Woonsocket/Cumberland area after the mills closed. He noted the South Shore area in South County served by United Water may be experiencing increasing water restrictions.

Members discussed state and local conditions. Mr. Gary Friedman, RI Emergency Management Agency, reported no comments at this time. Mr. Mark Adelman, Office of the Governor, queried members, stating the discussion seemed to center on a finding of "normal" conditions but was this, in fact, the general consensus? Mr. Ken Payne, RI Senate Policy Office, noted the discussion was informative. Mr. Spinelli stated there is a wide discrepancy of conditions across the state with many different issues. Ms. Crawley agreed, noting there is a variance across regions based on water supply, storage, precipitation, etc. She stated that drought impacts typically appear first in the southern region, especially in the agricultural sector

which is dependent on ground water resources. Members agreed the drought phase “Normal” would remain in effect based on current indices. Mr. Varin thanked committee members for their open and candid discussion.

#### 4. NEXT STEPS

Ms. Crawley requested discussion on the next steps to support the long-term indices and criteria. Mr. Robert Griffith, Chairman, Public Drinking Water Protection Committee, recommended the committee reconvene after Labor Day to review hydrologic conditions. Mr. Bettencourt cautioned members in using the term “normal” as current conditions are not normal. Dr. Anne Veeger noted Rhode Island meets the crop moisture criteria for a “drought watch” phase. Mr. Meyer agreed, stating different parts of the state vary but indeed the farmers are suffering as they are entirely dependent on ground water.

#### 5. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Varin concluded the meeting by asking if there was any further discussion. There being none, he noted it was not time to panic, and he hoped members understood their responsibilities and the need to closely monitor hydrologic conditions during the next couple of weeks.

The meeting adjourned at 9:55 a.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 14, 2005, 9 a.m., RI Water Resources Board Conference Room, 100 North Main St., 5<sup>th</sup> floor, Providence RI

Respectfully submitted,

Beverly O’Keefe, Supervising Planner  
RI Water Resources Board  
(401) 222-5732

Attachment A: August 16, 2005 Drought Steering Committee Meeting Attendees (Amirault, R., Bettencourt, A., Nimiroski, M., Crawley, K., Dellicarpini, J., Forgue, J., Friedman, G., good, A., Griffith, R., Mancini, A., West, J., Meyer, H., O’Brien, J., O’Keefe, B., Payne, K., Pepper, E., Varin, D., Veeger, A., Ward, H., Spinelli, B., Mariscal, J., Goslee, S., Adelman, St., Horwitz, R.

Attachment B: RI Drought Regions

**Figure 724-(4) Rhode Island Drought Regions**

